MINUTES OF MEETING OF COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
HELD IN NEW YORK CITY, FEBRUARY 5, 1927.

The sixth meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts, during the fiscal year 1927, was held in the office of Mr. Wm. Adams Delano, 126 East 38th Street, New York City, on Saturday, February 5, 1927. The meeting was called for the special purpose of considering the designs of the new British Embassy.

The following members were present: Mr. Moore, Chairman, Mr.Mowbray, Mr. Garfield, Mr. Morris; former members,-Mr. Cass Gilbert, Mr. Thomas Hastings, Mr. Daniel Chester French, Mr. Herbert Adams, Mr. Charles A. Platt, Mr. James E. Fraser, Mr. Louis Ayres, Mr. Milton B. Medary, Jr.; also Mr. H. P. Caemmerer, Secretary and Executive Officer.

Mr. Egerton Swartwout, architect, attended the meeting by invitation and to confer with the Commission on the subject of the Montsec World War Memorial.

Mr. Delano was unavoidably prevented from attending the meeting through the illness of his son, with whom he sailed to Bermuda during the day. Also Mr. Greenleaf and Mr. Taft were unavoidably prevented from attending the meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m.

1. PLANS FOR THE NEW BRITISH EMBASSY: The designs for the new British Embassy were received from the British Ambassador, Sir Esme Howard, through the Department of State by letter, as follows:

Department of State,
Washington, January 14, 1927.

Commission of Fine Arts,
Washington, D. C.

Sirs: The Department transmits herewith a copy of a note from the British Ambassador at this capital and under separate cover the drawings by Sir Edwin Lutyens of the proposed new Embassy of Great Britain at Washington,

I am Sirs,
Your obedient servant,
For the Secretary of State:
J. Butler Wright, Assistant Secretary.

British Embassy,
Washington,D.C.December 27,1926

Sir:I have the honour , at the request of His Majesty's Government, to

enclose herewith drawings by Sir Edwin Lutyens of the proposed new Embassy at Washington. These documents are intended for transmission to the Fine Arts Commission at Washington, in accordance with an offer made by Sir Lionel Earle, Secretary to His Majesty's Office of Works, when he had the honour, during his visit to Washington in September, 1924, to be received by the President of the United States.

I have the honour to be
with the highest consideration,
Sir
Your most obedient,
humble servant,
(Signed) Esme Howard.

The plans were nine in number, consisting of:--

No.1 Ground Floor, Plan of House
No.2 First Floor Plan
No.3 Basement of House and Ground Floor of Chancery
No.4 Southeast and Southwest Elevation
No.5 Section through Kitchen court, Chancery and Ball Room
No.6 Section through Porte Cochere and Ambassador's study
No.7 Cross Section, including section on Main Axis looking N.W.
No.8 Chauffeur's Cottage and Laundry, at north corner site.
No.9 Layout of House and Gardens.

A print of the "Landscape Plan" (No.9) had been sent to Mr. Greenleaf, who reported that he was pleased with it but that "one cannot judge adequately from a single diagram. Mr. Lutyens' name goes far with us. I think the fore court interesting".

The secretary stated that in the absence of a location plan, which Mr. Moore had asked of the Ambassador, he had made inquiry orally as to the site for the new Embassy and had learned that it is to be located adjacent to Observatory Circle, on the south side of Massachusetts Avenue, where it will occupy about 4 acres.

The plans were carefully inspected by the Commission and gone over with much interest. The Commission recognized in the plans a splendid structure in typical English style, by one of their great architects; and being of the Georgian type of design, a structure that would fit in well with the fine

buildings and landscape of Washington.

In going over details of the plans, the Commission called attention to characteristics of British architecture in contrast with American architecture. Attention was called to the gardens in relation to the main structure; the separation of the servants' quarters from the Embassy. The entrance for guests seemed to the Commission somewhat narrow, and in this connection attention was called to the arrangement at the White House, which they regarded simple and ordinary but very convenient.

It was noted from a map of the Highway Plan of the District of Columbia that some of the streets in the locality were not laid out, but the Commission felt that such changes therein would be made as would be found necessary to meet the requirements of the new Embassy plans.

As for the interior arrangement, here also attention was called to characteristics of English architectural planning, as the arrangement of the offices, the kitchen far away from the dining room, the stairways and fireplaces, designed to suit the taste of the English people.

On the whole the Commission were highly pleased with the plans, as being in general appearance and character very satisfactory, and they were unanimously approved. (Exhibit A).

2. WORLD WAR MEMORIAL AT MONTSEC, FRANCE: The American Battle Monuments Commission resubmitted the plans of Mr. Egerton Swartwout, Architect, for the World War Monument at Montsec, France, with letter, dated February 3, 1927, and a copy of a letter from Mr. Swartwout, in which he urged the acceptance of Plan B, showing a rectangular colonnade, in preference to the circular colonnade as indicated by Scheme A, approved by the Commission on January 6, 1927, and that in this Mr. Fraser, who is to be associated with

him for the sculpture, concurred (Exhibit B).

Mr. Swartwout and Mr. Fraser presented their views in regard to the design in person. Mr. Swartwout said that he and Mr. Fraser had been giving thought to this memorial for a year and a half, during which many designs were considered and a visit to the site for the monument was made. The monument, he said, will be on the top of a hill, about 390 feet high and having a slope of about 45 degrees; and while the circular type of monument had suggested itself to him, he and Mr. Fraser had come to prefer the rectangular type of design for a number of reasons:--the hill is not round but elongated, and therefore a rectangular monument in their opinion is better for it; the double colonnade feature was suggested by Mr. Fraser, who recalled a design for a memorial made by Mr.McKim, for which Mr. Saint-Gaudens was to make a monument to be placed in the center of it,-a design which has never been carried out and in this respect the monument would be original; the locality is unoccupied and to draw attention the monument must have mass, which the double colonnade of the rectangular monument gives; the inner row of columns would rest on a podium, and thus be higher than the exterior columns, giving a greater feeling of height to the structure and providing space for a sculptured frieze in the space between the caps of the inner colonnade and the parapet.

The Commission called attention to the fact that their particular reason for recommending the circular colonnade was that in their opinion it fitted better on the hill than the rectangular one and could therefore be seen better from all sides; also that it was simpler in construction than the one proposed with the double colonnade. Mr. Swartwout said that most of the visitors would see the monument from a distance, from which the shape

of the monument could scarcely be discerned, whereas the double colonnade was necessary to give what the monument needed, namely,mass. After further consideration the Commission felt that as both the architect and the sculptor were in agreement in the matter of design, and in view of the special reasons set forth by Mr. Swartwout in favor of the rectangular monument, they would be justified in that type of design, as indicated by Scheme B, for the monument. Mr. Morris felt that the columns of the rectangular structure were not in proportion. Mr. Garfield raised the question as to whether or not there is too much architecture in the design, which is proposed to enshrine the sculpture. Mr. Ayres thought there were too many columns in the colonnade. Mr. Swartwout repeated that he and Mr. Fraser had gone over the design carefully, and felt that the design as prepared was needed to give mass to the composition and would be a good monument for the location; that they could not erect the monument with the appropriation allowed for it in this country, but said they could do it in France.

The Commission considered the Montsec design further after the luncheon at the Century Club, during which the facts here stated were again considered. Mr. Gilbert said that he had been asked to design the monument for Montsec by the American Battle Monuments Commission but had declined; that, however, he had given thought to the question of design, having visited the site on a number of occasions, and that he had come to the conclusion set forth by Mr. Swartwout and Mr. Fraser in favor of a rectangular monument. For precedents of circular monuments Mr. Gilbert cited the Tomb of Cecelia Metella, the Temple of Vesta, and the Tomb of Hadrian or the Castle of San Angelo, which he said, so it is generally believed, at one time had a colonnade around it; and for a rectangular monument the Great Altar of Zeus at Pergamus.

The Commission felt that in their opinion it was of great importance

that the architect and sculpture be in harmony in the question of design, and being so in this instance, approved the erection of the rectangular monument, Scheme B. The American Battle Monuments Commission was informed accordingly. (Exhibit C).

3. WORLD WAR MEMORIAL AT BREST, FRANCE: Under date of February 4,1927, a letter was received from the American Battle Monuments Commission submitting designs prepared by the Howard Shaw Associates, Architects, of Chicago, for a memorial monument to be erected at Brest, France,"to commemorate the services of the American Navy in continental Europe and the surrounding waters during the World War". Three designs were submitted, which were described by the architects as follows:

> Design A. We have placed the shaft as near to the retaining wall as practical, so that its height would be as effective as possible from the harbor, and the view from the Cours d'Ajo as great as the space will allow. The shaft rises approximately 100' out of a shallow pool of water, giving a reflection which would emphasize the appearance of height.
>
> The shaft is to be of polished Black Swedish Granite, or a similar local material if it can be obtained. The crowning ornament and the ship's prows are to be of bronze, covered with gold leaf.
>
> Stairs in the interior lead to the top, which is surrounded by an ornamental wrought iron railing.
>
> Design B. The square shaft and decorations are of materials similar to those of Design "A", with a simple approach from the Cours d'Ajo, and with a corbeled ship's prow architecturally treated on the retaining wall. This prow is to be of cut stone, and of the same material of which the wall itself is constructed, so that the contrast in color will not be too great.
>
> Design C. For the circular shaft, set on a circular base 18' above grade level, we contemplate using a light grey granite, as light as obtainable in the district. The finial, which is in the form of a mermaid weather vane, and other metal ornaments are to be of bronze, treated with gold leaf.
>
> A number of features of these various designs are interchangeable, and probably some features from other schemes would be adapted in the one approved for the final design. Inscriptions and ornament cut in the granite, tablet, etc., will, of course, in the final be significant and in character with the purpose of the monument.
>
> We feel that the shaft treatment of the monument is the most logical and effective for the appropriation allowed."

Mr. Platt said the designs were not submitted in proper form, as it would be impossible to tell from blueprints what would be the best type of monument for the location and that they should be returned. The Commission were not at all satisfied with the plans, and disapproved schemes A and C. Scheme B the Commission decided should be given further study and simplified. Mr. Adams was asked which figure on the top of the monument would be preferable, from a sculptural standpoint, and he replied that sculptors have not attempted to answer that question, but that it is important to have the figure well modeled and in proper proportion to the monument itself. The figure of Scheme B was regarded preferable. The Commission advised omitting the prow of the ship. Mr. Moore called attention to the Rostral Naval Column of the Romans. A further study of Scheme B was requested(Exhibit D)

The Commission were the guests of Mr. Delano at luncheon at the Century Club. After the luncheon, the Commission considered the Public Buildings Program at Washington, during which the importance of having a well-designed plan for the "Triangle" between the Capitol and the Treasury Department was emphasized. An inspection was also made of a fine collection of paintings by Gari Melchers, which were on exhibition at the Club.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

COPY

February 8, 1927.

Sir:

The Commission of Fine Arts have the honor to return to you, for transmission to the Ambassador of Great Britain, the plans prepared by Sir Edwin Lutyens for a new British Embassy in Washington. The Commission of Fine Arts desire to express their appreciation of the courtesy of the British Ambassador and the architect in submitting the plans.

The plans are approved. The location of the new Embassy, and the extent of the group of buildings to be erected, makes the project an interesting one. The architect has friends among the American architects who are or who have been members of the Commission of Fine Arts. With a view to acquainting them with the plans, a meeting of the Commission was held in New York City on February 5th, which was attended by the former architectural members of the Commission,--Mr. Cass Gilbert, Mr. Thomas Hastings, Mr. Charles A. Platt, Mr. Louis Ayres, Mr. Milton B. Medary,Jr.; and also by Mr. Daniel Chester French, Mr. Herbert Adams, and Mr. James E. Fraser, sculptors. It was the opinion of these gentlemen and the Commission that the architect had presented plans indicating a group of buildings appropriate to the uses intended, expressive of the dignity of the nation and imbued with charm.

For the Commission:

Very respectfully, yours,

Charles Moore,

Chairman.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State.

EXHIBIT A.

THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY CONGRESS, MARCH, 1923

RECEIVED
THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS,
WASHINGTON, D. C.
FEB 3 1927
NOTED

JOHN J. PERSHING, Chairman
ROBERT G. WOODSIDE, Vice Chairman DAVID A. REED
JOHN PHILIP HILL FINIS J. GARRETT
D. JOHN MARKEY Mrs. FREDERIC W. BENTLEY
X. H. PRICE, Secretary

STATE, WAR, AND NAVY BUILDING
WASHINGTON

Feb.3,1927.

National Commission of Fine Arts,
Washington, D. C.
Gentlemen:

Referring to your letter of January 8, 1927, approving design "A" submitted by Mr. Egerton Swartwout for a memorial monument at Montsec, France, I have the honor to transmit herewith, for your consideration, a copy of a letter from Mr. Swartwout, dated January 17, 1927, explaining his preference for design "B", which was also the design approved by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

There are also enclosed the original copies of the following drawings submitted by Mr. Swartwout:

Four drawings showing: (1) Perspective; (2) section; and (3) ground plan of design "A"; and (4) view of Montsec with perspective of design "A" at summit, illustrating how this design will appear at a distance from the site.

Four drawings showing similar studies of design "B".

The American Battle Monuments Commission would appreciate your further consideration of design "B".

It is requested that your action and comments be communicated to the Commission, if possible, by February 8, 1927, as this Commission will hold a meeting on that day.

Sincerely yours,

X. H. Price

X. H. PRICE
Major, Corps of Engineers
Secretary.

9 enclosures

EXHIBIT 6

EGERTON SWARTWOUT

Architect

18 West 34th Street

January 17, 1927.

Major X. H. Price,
Secretary The American Battle Monuments Commission,
State, War and Navy Building,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Major Price:

Referring to the memorial at Montsec, and to your letter of January 14th in which you say that while the American Battle Monuments Commission voted in favor of design B, the National Commission of Fine Arts voted in favor of design A, and asking me to give your Commission any further recommendations I may desire to make on this question which will come up at the next meeting of your Commission.

Type of Memorial.

Before submitting the three schemes to your Commission I made a great number of studies and a number of different schemes. I have visited the site, and in fact have driven entirely around it and seen it from all sides, and have studied it carefully from maps and detailed contours and photographs. In fact I have been studying the scheme off and on for a year and a half. It was my desire to submit to your Board something that would fit the site and be appropriate; not too elaborate or grandiose; something that could be built within the appropriation, and also something that would be original and different from any memorial that has been erected. I early dismissed the idea of a great shaft, as that has been done so many times that it has become almost conventional, in spite of its appropriateness and beauty. And then again, I had the feeling that a great high shaft on that site would look too blatent in the landscape, and I rather questioned the taste of it. Once I got away from a shaft I was faced with the difficulty of building a structure big enough to count on the top of this great hill; this on account of the cost. So I fell back upon the expedient of an open colonnade. This idea has been used in several competitions lately where the designer felt the necessity of making a large and dignified structure, and yet could not do it on account of the appropriation, whereas an open colonnade, when seen at a little distance, counts almost like a solid building, although the cost is perhaps a tenth of what a solid building would be. A case in point was the recent competition for the Harding Memorial, in which all the contestants, obviously for this reason, used some form of an open colonnade.

ORIGINAL CHOICE

My first thought for an open colonnade for the Montsec Memorial was a circle, substantially shown in Scheme A. In the selection of this

scheme I was undoubtedly influenced by the same reasons which influenced the Fine Arts Commission in their decision. It seemed to me that as this memorial could be seen from all sides, a round plan would fit the site better than any other; each side would be the same and there is no question that a circular colonnade, or building of that size, is a very imposing and handsome shape. Personally the circle has long been a favorite form of mine, and I have used it in a number of buildings and memorials, notably, in the Elks Memorial in Chicago, in the Mary Baker Eddy Memorial, and in the competition for the Harding Memorial. I had tried other shapes, polygons and squares, but my early choice was for the round.

FINAL SCHEME.

As I have before stated, I have talked over this Memorial many times with James E. Fraser, the sculpter. This grew out of the fact that when I was originally assigned to a monument in London, in which it was evident that sculpture would play an important part, I asked Mr. Fraser to become associated with me, provided that this association was approved by your Commission, which I had every reason to suppose would be the case, on account of the eminence of Mr. Fraser, and the fact that he was a former member of the Commission of Fine Arts. When my contract was changed to Montsec I, naturally, talked with Mr. Fraser about the Memorial, as I saw him very frequently as he was doing a great deal of sculpture work in collaboration with me on the Elks Memorial and the Missouri State Capitol. While Mr. Fraser liked the round, he suggested that I hadn't given the square colonnade a fair trial in the sketches I had made, and instanced a conversation which he had had with St. Gaudens, in which St. Gaudens drew out a sketch of a square colonnade which Mr. McKim had worked up with him, which colonnade was to contain a statue in the center, and was, in his opinion, the most beautiful scheme for a memorial that he had seen. Itconsisted of a square, double colonnade, and he had carried up the interior wall over the inner colonnade to get a break in the roof line which eased off the contour of the memorial. I made a number of studies after that, using the square, double colonnade, and it struck me that the inner range of columns could be raised above the exterior columns and could be of a different order similar to the Propylea at Athens. This point, to the best of my knowledge, was not in Mr. McKim's scheme, but it seems to me is an improvement, if I may say so, because it gives a greater feeling of height to the structure as one enters it, and makes it possible to have the inner colonnade lighter and less heavy in appearance, and prevents the colonnade from looking absolutely solid when seen from a distance. It also gives a variety and a wonderful place for a handsome sculptured frieze in the space between the caps of the inner colonnade and the parapet. I also made the order somewhat lower and I think in much better scale than Scheme A. There is no question that Scheme B would look much bigger than Scheme A, although the square is the same dimension as the diameter of the circle.

ADAPTATION TO THE SITE.

Now the site, that is to say, the crest of the hill, is not

relatively round. It is an oblong, the length being over three times the width. Therefore, in all the schemes I felt the necessity of some sort of terrace or approaches that would not be square or round, but would be oblong to fit the general shape of the crest. I made a number of sketches over the photostat enlargements of the distant view of the hill which was supplied me, and I found that when drawn at the proper scale, the square looked just as well as the round. In point of fact I think it looked better. There is never enough sunlight in that part of France to cast any strong shadows for any definite length of time. In other words, the side in shade would not count very differently from the side in sunlight, consequently the angle at the corner is minimised, and this minimizing is increased by the fact that the structure is not a solid square but an open colonnade. And if there was direct sunlight this sunlight would strike the columns on the flank that were in shade in such a way that they would show sunlight on the lower portion. A column, being round, is always light on one side. Consequently I feel that even in brilliant sunlight the square form would not be emphasized. In the climate of that part of France, and at a distance, I am confident that the square appearance of the Memorial would not be much in evidence. Then too, it must be remembered, that the distant view of this Memorial is at almost a mile away at the nearest point so that the Memorial appears to a great extent in direct elevation and the parapet at the corner would not show in perspective as a sharp angle.

CLOSE UP EFFECT.

I am very sure that when seen close at hand Scheme B is much superior to Scheme A. A double colonnade is much handsomer per se than a single one. I did not think it was feasible to put a double colonnade on the circular form, because the diameter of the Memorial, 75 feet, was not sufficient to put in coupled columns of the size that I have shown. They would fill up the space too much, and on account of the curve would give an effect of a solid building at a distance. I have tried this in plan and in elevation. Moreover, in Scheme B the difference in the orders, and the difference in the heights of the orders, the opportunity for sculpture on the interior, and the general arrangement, make it, to my way of thinking, absolutely unique. Now there are a good many instances of a circular open colonnade. There were several such in Roman days, and the Harding Memorial recently finished is of that type, as is the Eddy Memorial, the memorial by Barrere & Hastings in some place in New Jersey, and probably a great many others. To my knowledge there is nothing at all similar to Scheme B in any structure that has ever been built. I wouldn't urge this point if it was the only point, but all other things being equal, which in this instance they arenot, a design that has never been built, or even published as a scheme, is more worthy, in my opinion, of consideration for a monument of this kind than a scheme which has been done before.

COST.

While I believe that either of the schemes could be built within the appropriation, still it is a well known fact that circular work is more expensive than straight work.

APPROPRIATENESS FOR SCULPTURE.

Mr. Fraser has gone over the points brought up in this report and concurs with them, and makes the suggestion that in his opinion a group of sculpture would look better in the center of a square colonnade than in the center of a round one. With this opinion of Mr. Fraser's, which is the result of a great deal of practical experience, I heartily concur. Mr. Fraser also wishes to emphasize the value of the sculptured frieze at the top of the inner colonnade.

CONCLUSION.

Considering the above points I am strongly of the opinion that Scheme B is better than Scheme A, and much better than Scheme C. An in this opinion I am strongly backed by Mr. Fraser who, though not an architect by training, has had a great deal of experience in architectural work, and is a man whose opinion I value on architectural points fully as much as I do on sculpture. It would be interesting for your Commission to know that Mr. Fraser says both Mr. McKim and Mr. St. Gaudens felt that a scheme substantially like this was one of the most appropriate monumental forms they had seen. I cannot but think that if the members of the Fine Arts Commission had visited the site and had studied the question as long as Mr. Fraser and myself have, they would feel as we do, that the square is just as appropriate for the site as the round, and as a scheme, B is superior to A.

Yours very truly,

EGERTON SWARTWOUT.

COPY

February 7, 1927.

Dear Major Price:

The Commission of Fine Arts, at their meeting in New York City on February 5, 1927, gave further consideration to the designs prepared by Mr. Egerton Swartwout, architect, for the World War Monument at Montsec, France, which you resubmitted with your letter of February 3, together with a copy of a letter from Mr. Swartwout in which he sets forth in detail his reasons for a memorial in the form of a rectangular colonnade instead of a circular one.

The Commission were in conference with Mr. Swartwout and also with Mr. Fraser, sculptor, who will be associated with him, as to the designs. The Commission were convinced that both architect and sculptor had given the question of design very careful thought, and the fact that they are in full agreement as to Scheme B, the rectangular colonnade, justifies the Commission of Fine Arts in accepting that design. The Commission therefore approve Scheme B instead of Scheme A.

For the Commission:

Very respectfully, yours,

Charles Moore,

Chairman.

Major X. H. Price, Secretary,
The American Battle Monuments Commission,
Washington, D. C.

EXHIBIT C.

COPY

February 8, 1927.

Dear Major Price:

The plans for the monument at Brest, France, as submitted in blueprints with no indication of the site itself, were not satisfactory. The Commission felt that the design should be entirely restudied, leaving off the prow of the ship and the beaks of the triremes, which have no organic relation with the structure. The opportunity at Brest is one which should be treated with dignity and charm. The proportions in Scheme B would seem to be the best approach to the problem.

For the Commission:

Very respectfully, yours,

Charles Moore,

Chairman.

Major K. H. Price, Secretary,
The American Battle Monuments Commission,
Washington, D.C.

EXHIBIT D.